

**Testimony
of
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I want to thank the chair and members of the Senate Special Committee on Aging for allowing me to testify today before you. I truly believe that all seniors in this country should be thankful to you for investigating and promoting the concept of healthy aging.

WHY am I involved now in sports and competition at the age of 74? It probably started with activities and the merit badge system (competition and self-discipline) in the Girl Scouts and playing games on the vacant lot next door. My parents taught us, "Whatever you do, give it your best effort." There always has been a competitive streak in me whether it is academics, dancing, sports, sewing, housework, gardening, etc. I often envy people who can do things on a recreational basis. Competition takes dedication, desire and lots of hard work along with self-discipline.

Sports and competition are my life. I approach the subject from many viewpoints. From my 35 years as University Professor of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance as well as an educator, coach, and author; from my 10 years as an ice skater traveling all over the world with Holiday on Ice; as a dancer in operas and musical comedy; from my 30 years as a firearm instructor; and from my role as an athlete still competing and winning in numerous sports (archery, rifle pistol, high power rifle, swimming, cycling, track and field, weight throwing pentathlon, summer biathlon - cross country run with two stops to shoot a rifle - basketball, long distance road races, race walking, decathlon and triathlons!

At age 62, while teaching at Louisiana State University, I found out about the Louisiana Senior Olympic Games when the director asked me to manage the archery and shooting events. When people started arriving, I started asking questions and found out I was eligible to compete, too. So I entered four events and won two gold and two silver - on the spot with no practice. The next year, I was ready - entered nine events and won nine golds!

The idea of competing by age groups was a real equalizer. Up to that point, I had to compete in the open division - against all ages and sometimes against men. Tennis and Masters' swimming had age categories, but the idea was just appearing in other sports.

In 1987, I entered the first National Senior Games held in St. Louis and won six medals in an expanding list of sports. That was fun to watch how happy these "older" folks were that they could compete - and sometimes WIN!

Through the years my medal count for the Louisiana Senior Games is about 225, for the National Senior Games about 20 medals, some 250 for National Masters Track & Field, plus seven National Titles in the Summer Biathlon. In addition, I have numerous medals in multi-sport events (decathlon, run-bike-run and triathlon). At my first National Indoor Master's Track & Field Championship, I set four American Records, and since then have set numerous other American Records and World Records in triple jump and hammer throw. What a thrill! And the thought came, "Why did I wait so long to start in these other sports?" The answer - The National Senior Games Association wanted the seniors and was planning events for us!

In keeping with my philosophy "Never stop learning," I usually take one or two classes each semester at the University (foreign languages are my favorite) - it's mentally stimulating and being around the

students keeps you in tune with "modern" life. I keep adding sports, also. Two years ago I went to a camp hosted by an Olympic Coach for sculling and sweep rowing. After two months practice, I entered the World Indoor Rowing Championships and placed second! Other World level medals include 10K cross country run, pistol, and the Weight Throwing Pentathlon (javelin, discus, shot put, hammer throw and weight throw) - and I only weigh 110 pounds!

My new sports besides the sculling are golf, badminton and pole vaulting. Even with all this practice and competing, I still have to find time for my business even though I retired from teaching in 1988. Being involved keeps you alert, gives you energy, offers a chance for travel and promotes better health. By competing in a variety of activities, you use different muscles and this cross training prevents overuse injuries.

The only time I have been in a hospital since having my tonsils out at about age 10 was about three years ago when a car ran into me while I was training on my bicycle and crushed my left hand. In 38 years of teaching, I missed only four days of classes, and that was a bad case of flu.

Along with physical activities, mental skills are developed, such as concentration, patience, self-discipline, goal setting, becoming non-judgmental about outcomes, and mental management. These traits carry over and help you in everyday activities, too. Some sports are considered 75% mental once the basic skills are learned.

And what about "Never give up" - occasional mishaps like the collision with the automobile and asthma challenge me so I have to alter some training procedure, but that doesn't stop me. "It is a bend in the road - but not the end of the road. Use every such obstacle as a stepping stone -not a stumbling block."

Once with my right hand in a cast, I learned to use the left hand to perform and qualify for the National Senior Games. I also ran in a summer biathlon race and shot seven out of 10 bullseyes in the Nationals.

Physical fitness is a way of living - every minute, every day. Physical fitness should be part of everyone's lifestyle regardless of age - but especially for seniors. Part of the reason is that as the body ages, the effects are to reduce muscular strength and endurance.

For some, maintaining fitness is only for good health; for others it may be physical fitness with emphasis on developing and toning the body; for others it is competitive fitness; for testing skills against others. Whatever the choice, exercise and physical activity should be combined with good nutrition and adequate sleep and relaxation. Each individual needs to find an activity that they enjoy and do it regularly and often.

One simple but effective formula for fitness is to let your medicine be your food, and your food be your medicine. Eat a variety of foods, lots of fruits and vegetables and do not over eat.

Likewise, let your daily house and work routines supplement your training - sweeping, repairing a fence, planting a garden, painting, washing by hand. All of this strengthens your body and keeps you flexible. Choose a hobby and go for it - mentally and physically!

The National Senior Games Association and its affiliated State Senior Games programs, offer the nucleus of planned activities for those ages 50 and older. Local councils on aging are involved in organizing recreational activities, outdoor events and educational classes to keep the seniors active. A better quality of life depends on good health and participation. The opportunities are there.

That is the motto of the National Senior Games Association - "promoting healthy lifestyles for seniors through education, fitness and sports."